

# DRAFT

Mr. Richard J. Lundin  
Wondjina Research Institute  
83 S. Stewart St., Suite 302  
Sonora, CA 95370

Dear Mr. Lundin:

I am writing in support of the Upper Merced Tailings Study Area project.

The San Joaquin River Management Program provides a forum to identify problems and solutions to issues related to wildlife, flood protection, water quality, water supply, fisheries, and recreation. The SJRMP Action Team and Advisory Council have reviewed and discussed this project and support the effort to perform extensive testing of dredge tailings along the upper Merced River.

The Advisory Council is in support of the study proposed by Wondjina Research Institute and understands that testing of the dredge tailings will provide baseline information and data for the restoration of lands and future projects.

The 1995 San Joaquin River Management Plan recommends projects that increase awareness regarding the resources of the San Joaquin River watershed. The implementation of this study will also support the development of solutions that address issues of mercury, nitrates, and heavy metals in the dredge tailings along the Upper Merced River.

If you have any questions in this regard, please call Paula Landis at (559) 230-3310.

Sincerely,

Timothy Ramirez, Chair  
San Joaquin River Management Program  
Advisory Council

**SUPPORTING  
DOCUMENTATION  
IS ON THE  
FOLLOWING PAGES**



## Wondjina Research Institute

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September 4, 2001

Mr. Timothy Ramirez  
Chair  
San Joaquin River Management Program  
3374 E. Shields Ave., Room A7  
Fresno, CA 937726-6913

Dear Chair Ramirez and other Members of the Advisory Council:

Wondjina Research Institute (WRI) is in the process of preparing a proposal for extensive testing of dredge tailings along an approximately 10-mile reach of the upper Merced River in Merced County (See Figure 1 attached for the location of the Upper Merced Tailings Study Area). WRI is seeking the support of the San Joaquin River Management Program (SJRMP) for its proposal.

### INTRODUCTION:

The Upper Merced Tailings Study Area (UMTSA) is an area has been one of extensive, past placer gold dredging activity. The volume of tailings remaining in this area from these activities has been estimated at over 50,000,000 cubic yards. As mercury was used in the processing of these materials, it has been widely assumed that these materials are somewhat contaminated. Recent testing by American Geological Services (AGS) and WRI of crushed tailings materials from several properties in this area suggests that mercury levels vary from less than 3 parts per billion (ppb) to 15 ppb depending on the particle size of the tailings. Additionally, the testing suggests that most of the mercury that is found associated with the tailings is directly found as coatings on fragments of gold.

### PROGRAM:

It is proposed that over the next year WRI conduct an approximately 400 test hole (a combination of backhoe and augured test holes) program throughout the UMTSA to determine levels of mercury, nitrates and heavy metals in the tailings. The purpose of this sampling is to provide a baseline information for restoration of lands that currently have only a limited potential for agriculture and open space use.

**It is hoped that this data will directly lead to projects return these lands to full utilization.**

In addition, it is proposed that the materials be sampled to determine the suitability for being made into aggregate products so as to determine which lands can provide salable materials that will be able to provide funds for restoration efforts.

**As indicated on Figure 1, not all properties with tailings will be sampled. Those properties in YELLOW have already been sampled and the information is available. These properties are specifically excluded from the project.**

**In addition to the approximately 400 hole testing program, WRI will endeavor to sample the approximately 50 water wells within the UMTSA for mercury, heavy metals and nitrates.**

**All analyses of soils and water will be conducted by CALOSHA certified laboratories**

As this proposed project will affect the landscape of the tailings and has the potential to disturb prehistoric and historic era cultural resources of the UMTSA, it is further proposed that a Class I-II cultural resource survey of the approximately 10,000 acres be initiated prior to any ground disturbance activity. This Class I-II survey will involve consultation with local residents who have a long history of residing in the area and the MiWok, Yokut and other Native American groups that are known to have inhabited the area.

As noted above, WRI is in the process of preparing its proposal that will be submitted to CALFED on September 21<sup>st</sup>. As the provisions of the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) Request for Proposals allow for private organizations to submit proposals, WRI is simply requesting from you organization a letter of support for WRI's proposal concept. For further details of the proposal, please feel free to contact myself at WRI's Sonora Office.

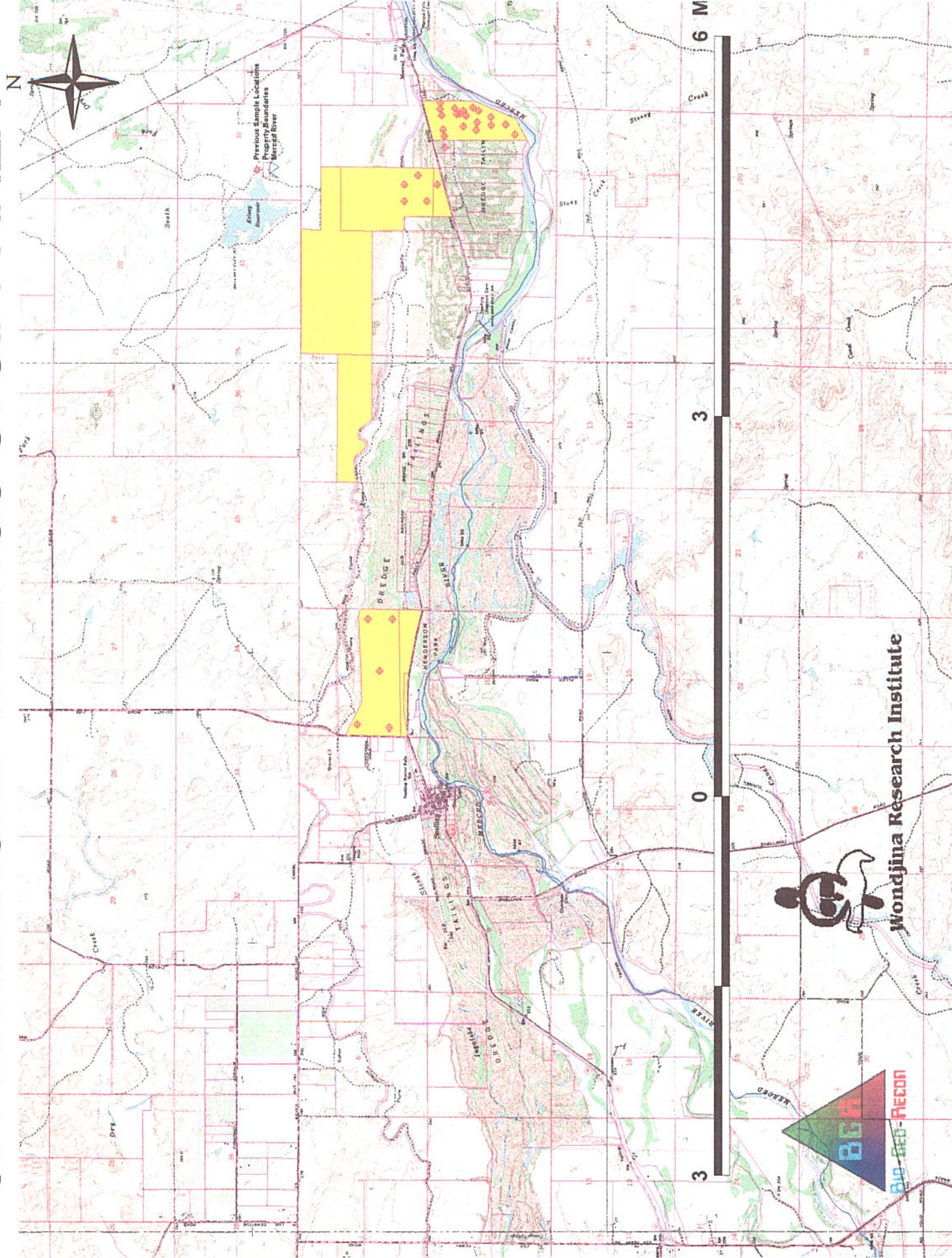
Sincerely,

Richard J. Lundin, MA  
Director, Wondjina Research Institute

CC: W1381 File  
Dr. Ross Grunwald  
Mr. Clyde Spencer, BIO-GEO-RECON  
Mrs. Charla Frances, Frances Heritage Services



# UPPER MERCED TAILINGS STUDY AREA



Wondjina Research Institute

